

making it personal

Whether you're a veteran at exercise or just starting to get back in shape after giving birth, a personal trainer can give you a real boost of confidence as well as provide expert advice on what will work best for your body. Physiotherapist and personal trainer Lisa Yates explains



As mothers, we somehow become very good at putting ourselves last. Remember back to your first pregnancy. It is highly likely that you were very good at eating a healthy diet, thinking about exercise, and getting adequate rest. With the focus always on the health of the baby, most women take excellent care of themselves during pregnancy. Then along comes baby, and with less sleep and more to do, we begin putting everything else before our own needs. Sadly, self-care activities can tend to slip away, and often the first thing to go is regular exercise. Before you know it you have become de-conditioned, your clothes are getting tighter and your self-esteem seems more fragile – you know the story! But could seeing a personal trainer be the answer?

How could a personal trainer help me?

A personal trainer is a professional who educates people about physical fitness. They are trained to assess a client's fitness and lifestyle and help them achieve their fitness goals. This may include assistance with body strengthening and toning, weight-loss, core control, aerobic fitness, improving flexibility, encouraging behavioural change, improving athletic performance, or injury prevention. Maybe you need help getting in shape after pregnancy or perhaps have a specific goal such as competing in a fun run or triathlon, but aren't sure how to go about it. Whatever your goal or circumstance, a good trainer should be able to help you achieve it. Sometimes the mere act of being accountable to someone is enough to encourage positive change.



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But I'm not a celebrity...

If you are like many Kiwi women, you may be thinking that personal training is only for celebrities or families with plenty of surplus spending money. While you are likely to be aware of the numerous benefits of being physically strong and fit, you may have never considered recruiting help to do so. However, sometimes even the smallest investment in your health and fitness can have the most amazing snowball effects.

Mum Katherine (32), of New Plymouth, explains, "I had never really considered seeing a personal trainer. I had always exercised regularly on and off, but continually battled with maintaining my goal-weight and self-esteem. During my first pregnancy, severe nausea meant that I had trouble gaining adequate nutrients and I became anaemic, making regular exercise difficult.

"After little Poppy came along, I was determined not to just accept the weight gain as a normal part of post-baby life. So as soon as I was able to, I commenced a regular walking programme,

combined it with some light weights, and with a renewed appetite (thanks to breastfeeding) I was able to ensure a healthy diet.

"Initially I found the weight came off quite quickly, but the last few kilos seemed really difficult to budge. When I felt sure that my pelvic floor and abdominal muscles were nicely recovered (about nine months after my daughter's birth), I decided to start jogging.

"I began slowly and gradually increased, but was finding it really hard work. I was having trouble motivating and pushing myself, even though I really did want to improve my fitness.

"So I made an appointment with Fiona Ross, who had a really good reputation. I was actually really nervous about seeing a personal trainer, but my fears were soon relieved. Fiona

spent over an hour talking to me about my goals, past exercise history and then had a look at my posture, core stability, and flexibility. I explained my main goal was to improve my running and hopefully lose the last few baby kilos.

"Through the couple of sessions we had together, I gained so much. For me, it was learning that I did have the capacity to push myself physically, that really made the difference. My aerobic fitness improved dramatically, and within six months I actually loved running. I actually became the fittest I have ever been. I felt amazing.

"This feeling really transpired into other areas of my life. I gained so much confidence and even ended up starting my own business.

"Achieving my fitness goals and improving my confidence was the best gift I could have given myself and my young family. The small amount of money I spent on seeing Fiona was possibly the best money I have ever spent."

How much will it cost?

An initial session with a personal trainer will cost anywhere between \$40-80 for 30-60 minutes. While many women will see a personal trainer regularly for an ongoing time, this might not be necessary. Many women just require an initial programme and then a follow-up every four to six weeks for reassessment and exercise adjustment. Sometimes using a personal trainer in this capacity can prove even cheaper than a full gym membership. The other advantage is that a good trainer should ensure you are doing just the right exercises to get the results you are after. Rather than just “going through the paces”, your trainer will help you to focus on correct technique and alignment; ensuring you really are getting the most out of your programme. Unlike a gym membership, which can tie you in to a contract, there is no obligation to continue seeing a personal trainer. Unless, of course, you are getting great results and want to continue doing so!

Not really keen on gyms?

Seeing a personal trainer might be just the thing to give you the confidence to enter the gym environment. Conversely, many trainers are self-employed and, in addition to gym-based sessions, are happy to work in a range of environments, including your own home.

I have personally worked with lots of women who aren't all that keen on attending gyms. They often have a small baby or toddlers at home and really just want some safe, practical exercise advice. They are usually concerned about getting their core and pelvic floor strong after pregnancies and also want help in losing weight. A simple home programme focused on core stability and some aerobic exercise, along with basic dietary modification, works really well. Women are usually thrilled with the results.

How to find a personal trainer

Unfortunately, in New Zealand anyone can call themselves a “personal trainer.” So it is important you ask a prospective trainer about their qualifications. In most cases it is best to find a trainer who is REPs registered. REPs is the Register for Exercise Professionals and is the independent verification that ensures trainers have met minimum international standards, and are continuing to update their knowledge through ongoing professional development courses. For more information, contact REPs on 0800 554 499 or email info@reps.org.nz.

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How to get the most out of your session

Make sure you have some idea why you are seeking help.

While a personal trainer should be a good motivator, personal training is really about behavioural change. Setting a personal goal, such as fitting in to your pre-pregnancy jeans, would be a great start! While a gym membership may not be required if you would rather exercise at home or outside, a good pair of trainers is important, as is some comfy clothing and a positive attitude.

Make sure you have set aside some time to really focus on your session and ask your trainer to write things down (or provide you with a programme) if you are worried you might forget things.

What can you expect?

An initial consultation should include a discussion about your current lifestyle and goals, including your motivation to exercise (or lack thereof!) and past medical and exercise history. A good personal trainer will be an excellent motivator and have an up-to-date knowledge of different types of exercise and the benefits of each. Before designing you a programme, they should assess your personal situation, taking into account your goals and the available resources, such as access to equipment.

What if I have recently had a baby?

If you are pregnant or have recently had a baby, then it is always advisable to check with your lead maternity carer (LMC) before commencing any exercise programme. If you have had a baby within the last year, or had several children in close succession, then please ensure that your trainer has a good knowledge of post-natal exercise. If you haven't done any real exercise since the birth of your child/children, then your core and pelvic floor may still be quite weak. Don't be afraid to ask questions and ensure that your programme included both core stabilising and pelvic floor exercises.

Be wary of pilates-type exercises unless your trainer has specific training in pregnancy and post-natal exercise. In many cases, these exercises can cause too much downwards pressure on the recovering abdominals and pelvic floor muscles. It is usually advisable to attend specific post-natal classes to ensure your core is strong before commencing any sort of high impact exercise. Alternatively, check out www.filifit.com for important advice about your pelvic floor and information on your abdominal muscles.

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Lisa Yates is a mother of two young girls and an experienced physiotherapist with a special interest in women's health. She is passionate about obstetric and continence physiotherapy and is also a women's personal trainer and wellness coach. Together with Fiona Ross, an experienced midwife and personal trainer, she founded FILiFit Ltd to help nurture healthy lifestyles. *The Core and The Floor* (available from www.filifit.com) is New Zealand's first post-pregnancy exercise programme designed by health professionals. This comprehensive DVD demonstrates everything you need to know to safely and effectively get in shape.